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Baesler: New Law Restores Education Authority to States

BISMARCK, N.D., Dec. 9, 2015 – North Dakota School Superintendent Kirsten Baesler said Wednesday that a sweeping new federal education law, called the Every Student Succeeds Act, takes important steps to restore control of North Dakota education policy to local and state officials, where it belongs.

“With the approval of this law, we can shape our school systems in North Dakota based on our own values, and what we know is important to the students in our state,” Baesler said at a news conference at the state Capitol.

The new law replaces No Child Left Behind, a federal law that Congress has been struggling to rewrite for the past eight years. It focused on using standardized tests in English, mathematics and science as measurements for school district accountability, and specified penalties for schools that failed to make “adequate yearly progress” on tests.

Baesler said the North Dakota State Assessment is going to be shortened this spring. The validity and reliability of the English and math exams will be retained, while reducing the amount of time our students spend taking tests. “This will give our teachers more time to teach,” Baesler said.

The superintendent said the Department of Public Instruction also plans to begin a routine, deliberative review of North Dakota’s English and mathematics standards, to ensure our standards reflect North Dakota’s goals, values and expectations.

The present standards were approved in 2011. Normally, the department does a standards review every five to seven years. Baesler said the review will discover which standards our North Dakota educators feel confident in teaching, and which ones may require more support.

“Our teachers deserve more time and support with these standards,” Baesler said.

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In March 2013, three months after she first took office, Baesler withdrew North Dakota's waiver application. Her decision was made with the support of North Dakota United, the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders and the North Dakota School Boards Association.

"At that time we decided we were going to focus our efforts on getting a new federal law to replace No Child Left Behind," Baesler said. "Now that goal has almost been reached, and I believe our steadfast approach has brought us results."

Under the new law, Baesler said North Dakota will still have challenging academic standards and more control over assessments.

The state must write an accountability plan for education. Baesler said that during the next 18 to 20 months, she will bring together K-12 stakeholders to write our state plan based on what we value and what we know makes a quality school.

"Once we determine what we want to measure, we will also be able to determine what needs to be done to help our lowest performing schools," Baesler said.

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